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Middle East, Africa, South Asia

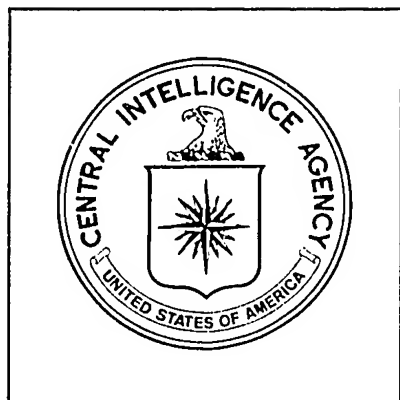
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MIDDLE EAST - AFRICA - SOUTH ASIA

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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Ethiopia*Government Offers Concessions on Eritrea*

The ruling military council is attempting to implement its recently announced decision to pursue a peaceful solution to the insurgency in Eritrea province. On January 5, the council announced substantial concessions to Eritrean tribal and religious notables. The local leaders, who apparently have been in contact with the insurgents, had presented a list of demands to government representatives in Asmara last week. Despite the government's concessions, some elements of the Eritrean Liberation Front have rebuffed the council's offer to negotiate a political settlement.

In its announcement, the council said it had directed its forces in Eritrea to relax security measures and to exercise maximum restraint in carrying out their duties. The provincial leaders had demanded that the government confine troops to their barracks and stop all military operations in the province.

The council also agreed to review the cases of all Eritrean political prisoners and held out the prospect of granting them amnesty or reducing their sentences; the council excluded prisoners charged with murder or other serious criminal offenses. The local leaders had asked for the release of all Eritrean political prisoners.

In response to a demand by the notables that Eritrean students be excluded from the government's nationwide rural development program, the council said it would make "special arrangements" for Eritrea. The council also met an Eritrean demand that it publicize the meetings in Asmara. Previously, the government-controlled media had not reported the sessions.

The council sent Information Minister Mikael Imru to Asmara to convey personally to the local leaders its reply to their demands. In its statement,

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the council said the local leaders were authorized to contact "Eritrean insurgents" and to convey to them the need for a peaceful solution to the conflict. This was the first time an Ethiopian government has referred to Front members as insurgents; previously they had been labeled "bandits."

Last week, before making these concessions, the council had agreed to hold direct negotiations with the rebels, meeting a key demand of the local leaders. The provincial notables, in return, agreed to urge the insurgents to accept a cease-fire. Local leaders are alleged to have already begun talks with insurgent leaders on a possible truce and direct negotiations between them and the council.

According to initial press reports, exiled leaders of one of the Front's two major factions issued a statement in Cairo on January 6 refusing to negotiate with the council except to arrange for the withdrawal of army troops from the province. Leaders of this group reiterated their demand for complete independence for Eritrea and said their group was ready to increase combat operations. This group does not speak for the entire front, and the insurgents who reportedly have been holding talks with the local Eritrean leaders may not have approved the Cairo statement. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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Angola*Nationalists Prepare for Round-Table Talks*

The leaders of Angola's three rival liberation groups and Portuguese officials are to meet this weekend in Portugal to discuss formation of a transitional government that Lisbon hopes will lead Angola to independence this year. The nationalist leaders now appear willing to set aside, if only for the time being, their longstanding personal and political differences in order to revive the flagging decolonization effort in the territory.

Following two days of talks last weekend in Mombasa, Kenya, the three leaders--Holden Roberto of the National Front for the Liberation of Angola, Agostinho Neto of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, and Jonas Savimbi of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola--issued a joint communique in which they pledged to work together for an independent, democratic, and multi-racial Angola. In a separate agreement, the two most important nationalist chiefs, Roberto and Neto, who have been archrivals for more than a decade, promised to end all hostile political and military actions against each other.

During the years of insurgency in Angola armed clashes occurred between the two groups, and since the coup in Lisbon last year the two leaders, supported by rival foreign patrons, have waged an incessant propaganda battle against each other. For the past year or so, Roberto has assisted a faction within Neto's organization that has unsuccessfully sought to oust Neto from leadership of the Popular Movement.

The Mombasa communique gave no details on how the three leaders are likely to deal with a number of difficult issues that seem sure to provoke hard bargaining at the roundtable session with the Portuguese. In the short time devoted to the talks they could hardly have concerted their positions on

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such matters as ground rules for political activity and how their groups will share military and security responsibilities during a transitional period. Nor, in all probability, did they give much thought to the future of Angola's 500,000 fearful whites--a primary concern of Lisbon. The nationalists common basic position is that the territory's whites should cease considering themselves a separate power bloc and should join one of the three liberation groups.

The Mombasa agreement did suggest, however, that the rival leaders may at last be ready to enter a transitional government, a development the Portuguese have been trying to bring off for some time. Until now, each of the three nationalists has refused to share power with the others in the hope that he could maneuver himself into a dominant position at the outset of a transitional government. Such a position, each reasoned, would go a long way toward securing his political supremacy upon independence.

Despite the modest step forward represented by the Mombasa accord, cooperation among the rebel leaders could be short lived. The personal ambitions and conflicting political ideologies of Roberto and Neto, and the deeply-rooted ethnic antagonism between the groups they lead--representing two of Angola's largest and most powerful tribal communities--are likely to impose severe strains on a transitional government. How serious the rebel leaders are about avoiding these strains should become more evident during their forthcoming negotiations with the Portuguese. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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